



Clay Community Health Happenings

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Clay County Health Department News – Special Edition

INCREASED REPORTS ABOUT RACCOONS AND FOXES “ACTING WEIRD”

In the last several months, Clay County Health Department (CCHD), Clay County Animal Control and the Florida Fish and Wildlife (FWC) have gotten many more calls than usual about unusual wild animal behavior. Most of the calls have been about “strange” behavior in raccoons and foxes. Callers report raccoons and foxes out during the day, look confused, staggering, having seizures, or just sitting or lying down. In some cases, a person can get very close to the animal and it never moves.

Raccoons are usually night creatures. However, experts tell us that raccoons are getting used to the residential development. Seeing raccoons during the day has become more common in recent years. These raccoons may not be diseased but are getting used to being around people.

There are two diseases that could cause strange behaviors in these animals. These diseases are canine distemper and rabies. Laboratory testing of the animal is the only way to determine if it is diseased or not. That is why it is important to stay away from wild animals. This means pets as well as people.

What is Distemper?

Canine distemper is a highly contagious virus affecting animals, but not people. It attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems of puppies,

dogs, foxes, raccoons, wolves and ferrets. The virus is spread to other animals by airborne respiratory discharges from an infected dog or wild animal.

Eye discharge is the first sign of distemper. Dogs may also develop fever, nasal discharge, coughing, decreased appetite, vomiting and diarrhea. As the disease progresses, the virus attacks the nervous system. These symptoms include seizures, twitching or partial or complete paralysis. Distemper is often fatal in animals.

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a disease that is deadly to people and animals. Like distemper, the rabies virus attacks the nervous system. Signs of rabies in animals include fearfulness, aggressive behavior, increased drooling, staggering, or seizures. Most rabies cases occur in wild animals, bats, coyotes, raccoons and foxes. Cats are the most common domestic pet that gets rabies, although unvaccinated dogs are also at risk. Pet owners should be sure their pets do not roam free and receive rabies vaccinations. This will decrease the possibility of rabies infection.

What should you do to keep your pets healthy?

- Vaccinate your pets for both distemper and rabies and keep the vaccinations up-to-date
- Keep them away from wildlife such as raccoons or foxes
- If your pet is ill or you have questions, contact your veterinarian

- Keep your pets away from other ill pets/animals
- Discuss your pet's health and vaccinations with your veterinarian
- Know your area and keep a lookout for sick or injured wildlife
- Do not feed the wildlife, keep trash cans covered

What should you do if you see a sick raccoon or other wildlife?

- Stay away from the animal
- Do not approach or attempt to pick it up
- Alert your family, friends, neighbors to the be on the lookout and avoid the animal
- You may notify animal control or the health department, but the animal will not be picked up and tested unless there is a human exposure

References: Centers for Disease Control:

<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

Florida Department of Health:

<http://myfloridaeh.com/medicine/arboviral/Zoonoses/Zoonotic-index.html>

American Veterinarian Association:

<http://www.avma.org/>

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation:

<http://www.myflorida.com/agency/27/>



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